

Sacred Giving
Romans 15:22-33
Parker Evangelical Presbyterian Church
August 14, 2011
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Prayer. Well, we are coming to the end of Romans, just three more weeks in this book and then we are going to start a new series on worship the week after Labor Day when, as you know, we will be down at Aurora Reservoir having our baptismal services. If you've never been a part of that, I have to tell you, it really is a highlight for the year. We'll have a great time of worship. A great time of fellowship. There will be food to enjoy afterwards. And one of the things that really excites me is when we head down to the water together and are led by a bagpiper! It's a great experience and something you will not want to miss so mark it down on your calendars and if you haven't been baptized or want to be rededicated, please let us know so we can get you signed up. Send us an email. Talk to me after the service. It will be awesome! After that, as I said, we will be starting a new series on worship. Here at PEPC we believe that one of the fundamental ways we connect as a Body of Christ with God and with each other is through corporate worship. But what is worship? And how do we know if it truly honors God? Right? I mean, after all, He is the one who gets to decide that, does He not? You and I don't because worship isn't about us, it is about God. So we will be looking at the Book of Revelation, chapters four through twenty-two. Now I know many of you are thinking, wait a minute, I thought Revelation had to do with the end times and when Jesus returns. It does. But it also teaches us a great deal about worship as well as John, the writer, sees these visions of heavenly worship throughout the book. So buckle your seat belts because it's going to be a wild ride and should be a lot of fun!

Okay, something to look forward to, but this morning we are still looking at Romans. Open your Bibles to chapter fifteen, verse twenty-two and we'll read to the end of the chapter. Let me walk us through this section and then I want to come back and tag one idea for us this morning. Paul says, **This is the reason why I have so often been hindered from coming to you.** Here he's referring to the fact that his work of evangelism has kept him too busy to get to Rome. **But now, since I no longer have any room for work in these regions** because the Gospel has now been preached, **and since I have longed for many years to come to you, I hope to see you in passing as I go to Spain, and to be helped on my journey there by you, once I have enjoyed your company for a while.** Now there is a lot of debate over whether or not Paul actually made this trip to Spain. To me what's important is that we continue to see Paul's desire to preach the Gospel to new regions in the world. He has this fire, this passion, to preach to unreached people. People who have never heard the Gospel before in their lives. This is something I pray continues to develop here at PEPC among us. I pray often that God will give us a passion to share the Gospel with those who are lost and wandering, who have no idea that there is a God out there who loves them warts and all. I know some of you have this passion. I think about a Randy Davis, someone who grew up here at PEPC, and then went on the mission field to Bolivia. There he met his beautiful wife Dani and I know they hope to go back here in the next year. One of the things that really drives Randy and Dani is their ministry to the shoeshiners. This is a particular sub-group among the very poor who literally wear masks when they do their work because of how ashamed they are of their condition. And Randy made great inroads while he was down there with this group and many of them had never heard the Gospel. Never believed God could love them. Felt too ashamed, too broken, too poor. And if you ever have the chance to hear Randy talk about it, it's really a beautiful story. Randy and Dani have a

heart like the Apostle Paul. To preach to those who have never heard about Jesus. I pray we do as well.

But Paul doesn't stop there, he goes on to talk about the main purpose for his visit and that is to take up a collection for the Jewish Christians who are suffering in Jerusalem. **At present, however, I am going to Jerusalem bringing aid to the saints. For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make some contribution for the poor among the saints at Jerusalem. For they were pleased to do it, and indeed they owe it to them. For if the Gentiles have come to share in their spiritual blessings, they ought also to be of service to them in material blessings. When therefore I have completed this and have delivered to them what has been collected, I will leave for Spain by way of you. I know that when I come to you I will come in the fullness of the blessing of Christ. I appeal to you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to strive together with me in your prayers to God on my behalf, that I may be delivered from the unbelievers in Judea, and that my service for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints, so that by God's will I may come to you with joy and be refreshed in your company. May the God of peace be with you all. Amen.**

So let's talk about our giving this morning. And before we do, I want us to remember that throughout this whole section we have been asking the question what does it mean for us to be a living sacrifice? What does it mean for us to offer our lives back to God as a spiritual act of worship? In short, we asked what it meant for us to live a truly sacred life. Now, if you remember, we looked first at the transformation of the mind. How following Jesus changes how we think, how we see the world around us. Then we looked at the transformation of the heart and Paul took us through a litany of new attitudes and new character traits that begin to be

formed in you once you make the decision to follow Jesus. Then we saw how this changed our relationship with the government and other, even secular, authority figures in our lives. Then we looked at relationships and we saw that when we offer our lives as a spiritual act of worship that that changes how we interact with each other. We seek the good of those around us and we start living not for ourselves but for others. We don't pass judgment and the strong and mature in faith are called to bear with those who may be younger or newer in their faith. This is how relationships are supposed to work in the Body of Christ. Remember that phrase from St. Benedict? He gives the strong something to aspire to and the weak nothing to run from. That's how we are to live as a church family. We don't make mountains out of molehills. We don't die on every hill. There are some things that are essential, foundational to our life together and then there are some things that are secondary matters, adiaphora right? Areas that are non-essential where we should show each other some grace. And finally, we saw that the reason we do all this is because by doing so we imitate our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We follow in His footsteps. We live as He lived. This is what Paul did. And this is what so many Christians have done down through the ages, lived as Jesus lived. Walked as Jesus walked. Sought to pattern their lives after his. This is the essence of the sacred life and I believe God looks down from heaven and I believe He's searching for a group of people who will take this call seriously. Because God wants to redeem the world. He wants to reclaim it and heal it and eradicate sin and evil and he wants to end suffering and pain and provide comfort and strength but He has determined, from the moment He tapped Abraham on the shoulder in a little town called Haran in the Middle East, that He would do all of that through us. Crazy, I know! But from Genesis to Revelation, that's what the Bible says.

So that's why we have to talk about our money. Money, as I shared with the kids, is not evil. It's not bad. It's not good. It's just a tool, an instrument. And we have a choice just like we do in every other area of our lives. How are we going to use this tool? Will it be for God's glory? For His Kingdom? Or will we use it for ourselves? Now, I want to be clear here. When I say God's Kingdom, I don't mean PEPC. Those two are not the same. PEPC is certainly a part of God's Kingdom but I am not talking just about what you and I may drop in the offering plate on a given Sunday. You see too many of us have compartmentalized our giving just like we have compartmentalized our time and our lives. We put God in a box and we think that what we do for God only happens on a Sunday morning. What we give to God only happens through the check I make out to my local church. But God's so much bigger than that! And He wants so much more than that! He wants it all! I remember talking with a friend several years ago who was about to make a purchase that I wasn't sure was all that wise. And I asked my friend if they had talked to God about it. And they said, what do you mean? And I said, well, don't you think God may have something to say about how you spend your money? And they responded by saying, I give my tithe, don't I get to do what I want with the rest? How many of us think that way about our money? That as long as I pay God off, then I get to do what I want with the rest. Like God is the mafia or something and we have to pay him protection money so we won't get punished and can live our lives how we see fit. Just think Marlon Brando and the Godfather movies, right? But that's not what the Bible says. The Bible declares that all money is God's. Let me read a passage to you from Haggai 2:8. Here the people of God are struggling. They are poor. They don't have much. They've just returned from exile to the ruins of Jerusalem. And God tells them to rebuild the Temple. But they have nothing. And God says this, **Fear not. For thus says the Lord of hosts: Yet once more, in a little while, I will shake the heavens and the**

earth and the sea and the dry land. And I will shake all nations, so that the treasures of all nations shall come in, and I will fill this house with glory, says the Lord of hosts. The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, declares the Lord of hosts. The latter glory of this house shall be greater than the former, says the Lord of hosts. And in this place I will give peace, declares the Lord of hosts.” All of it is God’s.

I don’t know where we ever got this idea that we own anything. We don’t own the world in which we live. We don’t own our talents. We didn’t get to pick where we were born or what family we were born into. Everything we have in life is a gift from God, none of it is ours. And while these gifts are given to us freely out of God’s grace, there is a purpose behind them. That purpose is redemption. God wants us to use all that we have, all that we are, all our resources to further the mission of His Kingdom. So imagine what it would look like if instead of doing all we could to save for retirement, or for a house, or for that car you’ve had your eye on, or those clothes you like to wear, you name it...instead, we did all we could to free ourselves up to give. Imagine if giving was the overriding concern of our lives rather than investing in these temporary things that will one day pass away? Wouldn’t that change how we live? Imagine what life would look like if instead of piling up debt to purchase things we really don’t need, we instead were able to give freely and generously to the Lord whenever an opportunity came along? I think about the opportunity we’ve had to bless the Matthews family and how generous this congregation has been to them. Over seventeen thousand dollars. And think about the impact that money is going to make. You want to talk about an investment! The life of this young girl will never be the same! And that’s the Kingdom of God breaking through, breaking into this world, is it not?

One of the real blessings in my life is that from the very beginning of my walk with Jesus Christ, I have had mentors. Older men who intentionally poured their lives into mine along the way. One of those mentors is a man by the name of Don. Don retired early from IBM to work with college students up at CU. One time we were talking about this issue of finances and what God expected from us and he told me that when he retired he had planned well enough that he had a pile of money that would keep he and Dottie in retirement. He wasn't filthy rich but he wasn't going to run out either. It was enough to keep them in the standard of living to which they were accustomed. And over the years, he said, God kept calling him to write checks and that pile got smaller and smaller. Eventually, they had to sell their beautiful home, the place where they had hoped to have their grandchildren come and play, and move to a smaller condominium. Again, not because he had to. Not because the stock market crashed. Not because he lost it all in a ponzi scheme or went bankrupt. No, God just kept calling Don to write checks to support Kingdom ventures throughout the world. And what Don obeyed. Now, was it easy? No. They loved their home. They loved the lifestyle they led. It wasn't extravagant. It wasn't over the top. It was probably very close to the lifestyle many of us lead here in Parker. But they loved God more than their lifestyle. They loved God more than their possessions. And they understood that these things were just tools, resources really, that God had given them to advance the Kingdom and so when those opportunities came to support missionaries, to give to different Kingdom causes around the world, they would pray and ask God if He was calling them to give. And sometimes God would say yes and other times God would say no. And then they responded.

Now I know what some of you are thinking. If we are a typical evangelical church then the average giving in this room is under 3%. And if that's the case, then some of you are going

whoa. How do I get from here to there? How do I get from where I am, leveraged within in an inch of my life, in debt up to my eyeballs, to the place where I could be free to give like Don does? That gulf just seems too wide. Well, here's the thing. Don didn't get there overnight and neither will you. But it starts with a first step. Maybe that first step for you is taking Financial Peace University here at PEPC so you can get out of debt. Maybe that first step for you is going home today and sitting down with your family and looking over your budget, or even making a budget for the first time, so that you can take this resource and really put it to use for the Lord. Maybe that first step is to prayerfully consider what you are going to give first and then live off the rest rather than living first and then giving God what's leftover. I don't know. Whatever it is know that giving generously is a spiritual discipline just like any other and you have to work at it. You have to give it time to develop.

Now I understand that our economy is cratering. I get that times are tough. You know what, times were tough for those early Christians Paul was writing too as well. Brutal taxation to the tune of forty and fifty percent, plagues, warfare, political unrest all had taken their toll on the economy of those first century cities where these people lived. And yet, they understood that all they had was a gift from God to be freely offered back to him for the sake of the Kingdom. And God blessed them tremendously. You see, that's the real secret to all of this. God doesn't need our money. He's not short of cash. But He knows that when we give to something, we give a piece of our heart. Where our treasure is, there our heart will be also, right? So when we give, a piece of heart goes with it. We are now tied to that cause. We are now invested in the success of that venture. Again, think of Anastasiya. All of us who have given to that family and to that little girl are now invested in her life and that family. And when we get to see her for the first time...isn't that going to be incredible? To know we were a part of this miracle God was

working out? And how many of us can say the same about other miracles God has allowed us to be part of? That's the secret, friends. We don't give because we have to or because we'll get in trouble with God if we don't or because we're forced to. We give because cheerfully and joyfully from the heart because by doing so we get to participate in God's mission of redemption in this world. Now we are about to take our morning offering...